

POLITICAL OF RELIGION IN DIGITAL ERA: ANALYSIS OF JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S THOUGHTS

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Abstrak: Teknologi berkembang dengan pesat di era modern, menyebabkan masyarakat selalu dituntut untuk beradaptasi dengan cepat. Perkembangan teknologi menghadirkan dampak yang signifikan baik sebagai peluang dan sekaligus sebagai tantangan bagi masyarakat modern. Politisasi agama di era digital merujuk pada tindakan memanipulasi atau menggunakan agama dalam politik yang dilakukan dengan menggunakan teknologi digital seperti media sosial dan platform online lainnya. Media dalam postmodern merupakan elemen yang paling penting dalam mendistribusikan agama sebagai produk sekaligus komoditas yang dikonsumsi oleh masyarakat dan tidak jarang juga digunakan oleh para elit-elit politik yang memiliki kepentingan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif analisis, guna untuk melihat fenomena politisasi agama dengan menggunakan analisis teori Jean Baudrillard. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah media merupakan hal yang paling berpengaruh terhadap politisasi agama di masa sekarang. Media dalam sebutan Baudrillard menyebutnya sebagai dunia virtual, citra atau simulacra. Politisasi agama menggunakan media dengan menampilkan simulacrum atau simulasi-simulasi palsu untuk menampilkan citra semu kepada masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Politisasi Agama, Media, Simulacra, Hiperrealitas, Jean Baudrillard

Judul: Politisasi Agama di Era Digital: Analisis Pemikiran Jean Baudrillard

Abstract: The rapid development of digital technology has profoundly reshaped the socio-political landscape, including the domain of religion. This article examines the phenomenon of religious politicization in the digital age through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's theories, particularly simulacra and hyperreality. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the study explores how digital media serve not only as communication channels but also as mechanisms for producing and manipulating religious meanings for political purposes. In the postmodern context, religion becomes a commodified entity, symbolically reproduced through media to create fabricated images that blur the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. These religious simulacra construct a hyperreal environment in which public perceptions of religion are shaped by artificial representations, often exploited by political actors to gain influence and legitimacy. The article concludes that religious politicization in the digital era constitutes a form of simulation with significant implications for how religion is interpreted and experienced in contemporary society.

Keywords: Religious Politicization, Media, Simulacra, Hyperreality, Jean Baudrillard



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INTRODUCTION

Modern and postmodern Western civilizations consistently highlight material progress and welfare as the primary sources of human happiness,¹ often equating technological innovation with social advancement and individual fulfillment. This discourse finds its roots in Enlightenment ideals, where the promise of reason and scientific mastery over nature became synonymous with moral and societal betterment. However, postmodern critiques have problematized this linear narrative of progress, emphasizing fragmentation, plurality, and the destabilization of grand narratives that once underpinned Western thought. In practice, however, the disproportionate advance of technology relative to religious communities has rendered technology dominant, prioritizing material well-being for certain individuals, groups, and nations at the expense of broader societal and spiritual concerns.²

Building upon these transformations, the rapid evolution of digital tools and platforms during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries presents both unprecedented opportunities for connectivity and significant challenges for communal cohesion. Technological developments have precipitated what some scholars term a “moral emergency” in public life, as the boundaries between private and public spheres blur and the pace of information exchange accelerates. Consequently, these innovations influence social interactions in both face-to-face and online environments, reshaping norms of communication, authority, and trust.³

In this increasingly digitized society, social media has transformed from a secondary luxury into an indispensable necessity, deeply embedded in daily life and civic discourse. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram not only facilitate interpersonal connections but also serve as primary sources for news consumption, cultural exchange, and identity formation. While this digital ecosystem offers unprecedented avenues for community building and religious expression, it equally facilitates the rapid spread of negative values - such as provocation, misinformation or fake news (hoaxes), hate speech, and issues related to race, religion, and intergroup relations - both at the collective and individual levels.⁴

These developments are closely linked to the postmodern context, in which media constitutes the principal mechanism for distributing religion as both a product and a

¹ Sumiati, Sitti Satriani, “Dampak Ilmu Pengetahuan Teknologi Terhadap Iman dan Takwa Mahasiswa”. *Jurnal Tarbawi*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (2017): 112.

² J. Sudarminta, *Agama Dan Kosmologi, Orientasi Baru* (Jogjakarta: CRCS, 2006).

³ Andika Andika, “Agama Dan Perkembangan Teknologi Di Era Modern,” *Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 2, no. 2 (2022): 129, <https://doi.org/10.22373/arj.v2i2.12556>.

⁴ Efgi Sukma Baihaki, “Islam Dalam Menyikapi Era Digitalisasi”, *Sangkep: Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (2020): 185-208.

commodity consumed by society, frequently harnessed by elites pursuing specific agendas.⁵ Through carefully crafted imagery, curated narratives, and algorithmically driven content distribution, media actors manipulate public perception, at times blurring the lines between sacred traditions and commercialized representations. Moreover, media possess the capacity to manipulate facts and disseminate constructed religious images, which are then consumed by postmodern audiences seeking meaning and belonging in a mediated world.⁶

The dissolution of conventional boundaries between space and time in the digital era has fundamentally transformed how communities access and assess information, rendering societies acutely susceptible to both authentic and contrived content. This phenomenon stems from the instantaneous nature of online communication, where algorithm-driven feeds privilege sensational or emotionally charged material over measured analysis. As a result, powerful actors - including political elites, interest groups, and commercial stakeholders - exploit these dynamics to disseminate tailored narratives that advance their own agendas, often at the expense of nuanced public discourse and social cohesion.⁷

In this context, politics and religion emerge as deeply interwoven domains within postmodern societies, each exerting reciprocal influence on collective identity and power structures. The politicization of religion in the digital age denotes the systematic manipulation or instrumentalization of faith-based symbols and rhetoric to achieve political objectives via digital platforms such as social media, blogs, and messaging applications. Technological affordances - such as virality, microtargeting, and peer-to-peer amplification - have accelerated the spread of content, enabling actors to craft persuasive yet misleading narratives. A prominent manifestation of this trend is the strategic release of fabricated reports or orchestrated hoaxes that harness religious sentiments to sway public opinion, undermine rival groups, or legitimize policy agendas.⁸

Furthermore, the pervasive integration of social media into everyday life has elevated these platforms from optional communication channels to central arenas for political engagement and identity formation. Campaigns leveraging religious symbolism and moral appeals can rapidly mobilize online communities, yet they also deepen societal rifts by reinforcing in-group/out-group mentalities. Such practices frequently give rise to polarizing

⁵ R Asharudin, "Analisis Pemikiran Jean Baudrillard Tentang Simulasi Dan Realitas Dalam Konteks Era Digital," *Gunung Djati Conference Series*, 2023, <http://conferences.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/gdcs/article/view/1682>.

⁶ Ahmde, *Posmodernisme and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, Routledge, (2013):

⁷ Ahmad Junaidi, *Media Dan Komunikasi Politik, Media Dan Komunikasi Politik* (Depok: Mbiridge Press, 2018).

⁸ Noor Achmad, "Politisasi Agama di Era Digital dan Penanganannya", *e-Publikasi Ilmiah Unwahas*, (2018): 141-145.

rhetoric, heighten interfaith tensions, and institutionalize discrimination against minority faith communities both online and offline.⁹

Simultaneously, political actors and organized movements deliberately employ digital tools to cultivate and consolidate religious identities among target constituencies. Through coordinated content strategies - including livestreamed sermons, faith-infused political messaging, and algorithmically optimized advertisements - these groups aim to galvanize mass support by framing electoral choices as moral imperatives. This conflation of sacred values with partisan politics not only strengthens loyalties within the majority group but also marginalizes dissenting voices and undermines democratic pluralism.¹⁰

Yet, the same digital infrastructures that underpin religious politicization also furnish opportunities for progressive and civil society actors to champion religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and humanitarian causes. By deploying data-driven advocacy campaigns, online petitions, and virtual forums, these stakeholders can amplify marginalized perspectives, foster inclusive communities, and catalyze constructive debate on pressing social issues. In doing so, digital religion transcends its instrumentalization for political ends and becomes a vehicle for empowerment and transformative social change.¹¹

METHOD

The descriptive-analytical method is a research approach designed to describe, present, and explain the phenomena or objects under investigation in a detailed and comprehensive manner. It collects existing data to identify emerging patterns, trends, and characteristics. This method proves particularly effective for generating an in-depth understanding of the subject matter, as it enables the production of accurate and richly detailed descriptions of all observed elements.

According to Sugiyono, research methodology constitutes the scientific means of acquiring valid data with the objectives of discovering, verifying, and expanding knowledge, which can subsequently be employed to understand, solve, and identify problems within any given domain.¹²

⁹ Harun Harsono, “Politik Identitas Dan Partisipasi Politik Di Media Sosial: Analisis Model Struktural Pada Generasi Z Di Kota Malang,” *Electoral Governance Jurnal Tata Kelola Pemilu Indonesia* 4, no. 2 (2023): 166–87, <https://doi.org/10.46874/tkp.v4i2.752>.

¹⁰ Budi Kurniawan, “Politikisasi Agama di Tahun Politik: Politik Pasca-Kebenaran di Indonesia dan Ancaman bagi Demokrasi”, *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (2018): 133-154.

¹¹ Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana, “Agama Digital (Digital Religion) dan Relevansinya Terhadap Studi Agama Interdisipliner: Sebuah Tinjauan Literatur”, *At-Takfir: Jurnal Pendidikan, Hukum dan sosial keagamaan*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2022): 35-56.

¹² Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R&D*, Bandung: Alfabeta, (2009), 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical and Intellectual Setting of Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard, born on 20 July 1929 in Reims, France, emerged as one of the most incisive critics of consumer society and mass media in the latter half of the twentieth century. After studying German and sociology at the University of Paris–Nanterre, he joined its faculty and later taught at the University of Paris-X (Nanterre), influencing a generation of scholars and activists. In *The Consumer Society* (1970), Baudrillard argued that consumer culture had moved beyond satisfying needs to creating identities through the acquisition and display of objects. Modern consumption, he showed, operates through social signs, displacing traditional moral and communal values and immersing individuals in a relentless cycle of desire and obsolescence.¹³

Baudrillard's intellectual development was further shaped by Marshall McLuhan, whose dictum “the medium is the message” underscored the formative power of communication technologies. Extending McLuhan's insights, Baudrillard contended that media do not merely transmit content but generate new systems of signification, where representations precede and determine perceived reality. The political upheavals of May 1968 at Nanterre also shaped his thinking, exposing him to student-led challenges against ideological structures. His involvement with the radical journal *Utopie* deepened his engagement with anarchosituationist critiques of spectacle and structuralist Marxism, situating his thought at the crossroads of cultural critique and political radicalism. During this formative period, he drew on Marcel Mauss's analyses of social exchange, Georges Bataille's studies of transgression and eroticism, Freud's psychoanalytic models, and Marxist critiques of capitalism. These interdisciplinary encounters enabled Baudrillard to develop a dense theoretical framework foregrounding symbols, power, and desire.¹⁴

Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) offers a foundational critique of how postmodern societies experience reality through mediated images and symbols. He argued that rather than reflecting external truths, signs in late capitalism create a self-contained universe of simulations that precede and define the real. Baudrillard mapped successive orders of simulacra - from simple counterfeits to advanced hyperrealities — where originals become indistinguishable from their copies. Iconic examples include theme parks that compress history into spectacles and news media that script events as dramatic narratives. In

¹³ Fadhilah, “Relevansi Logika Sosial Konsumsi dengan Budaya Konsumerisme dalam Perspektif Epitimologi Jean Baudrillard”, *Jurnal Kybernan*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (2011): 40-57.

¹⁴ Muhammad Azwar, “Teori Simulacrum Jean Baudrillard dan Upaya Pustakawan Mengidentifikasi Informasi Realitas”, *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Kearsipan Khizanah*, Vol. 2, No, 1, (2014): 39-40

such environments, individuals no longer engage with unmediated reality but inhabit a realm of continuous sign-production, erasing the boundary between reality and its representation.¹⁵

This notion of hyperreality is even more pronounced in today's social media platforms. User feeds are algorithmically curated to privilege emotionally charged or sensational content, producing personalized echo chambers. Visual filters, staged "authenticity," and viral trends create experiences that feel genuine but are highly engineered. For instance, urban food influencers transform routine dining into hyperreal spectacles, offering "perfect bites" that simulate and even surpass actual taste. In these contexts, the simulated image does not merely distort the original but entirely replaces it, creating a collective orientation toward symbols over substance.¹⁶

Baudrillard extended his analysis to political life, arguing that it has become a spectacle of consumer culture. Political figures assume the aura of celebrities, deploying choreographed appearances, brand partnerships, and social-media endorsements to cultivate curated personas. Campaign rallies function less as forums for substantive debate than as media events designed to generate favorable imagery. Policy proposals are often secondary to the production of compelling soundbites and visual memes. Consequently, political "content" operates as a stream of symbolic gestures, with public opinion shaped by the coherence of the constructed image rather than by the material impact of governance.¹⁷

The intersection of religion and politics in the digital age exemplifies a similar transformation. Faith traditions are repackaged as media brands: televised sermons adopt cinematic techniques, and virtual pilgrimages are gamified to maximize engagement metrics. Religious symbols are optimized for shareability, while influencers monetize spiritual narratives through sponsored content. In this simulacral environment, rituals become performative displays divorced from communal practice, and theological nuance is traded for polarizing soundbites. Religion thus becomes another vector for image-based persuasion, deployed by actors who mobilize devotional affect to achieve political ends.

Despite this pervasive immersion in simulacra, Baudrillard gestured toward the potential of the sublime as a momentary rupture in the cycle of simulation - an experience that jolts individuals into an awareness of the underlying absence created by hyperreality. Such moments, he suggested, could foster critical distance and open pathways to reconsider the very frameworks through which reality is mediated.

¹⁵ Fitria, "Hiperrealitas Dalam Social Media (Studi Kasus: Makan Cantik Di Senopati Pada Masyarakat Perkotaan)". *Informasi*, Vol. 45, No. 2, (2016): 87

¹⁶ Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations."

¹⁷ Oktavianingtyas, Seran, Ridzki, "Jean Baudrillard and His Main Thoughts", *Propaganda*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (2021): 113-121.

Religious and Political Expressions in the Postmodern

Religious and political expressions in the postmodern era are inherently multifaceted and dynamic. Postmodernism, emerging in the twentieth century as a reaction to the certainties of modern thought, has profoundly reshaped cultural, religious, and political practices by challenging established traditions and epistemologies. Although no single definition fully captures its complexity, three key features are widely recognized: (1) the rejection of grand narratives, which deny any totalizing explanation of social phenomena; (2) pluralism and relativism, which embrace complexity and heterogeneity; and (3) the primacy of debate and critique, encouraging sustained critical engagement and reflexivity amid contested issues.¹⁸

Within this paradigm, religious and political discourses spread across diverse “micro-narratives,” each constructing its own symbolic order and interpretive logic. Digital media accelerates this fragmentation by curating niche audiences and amplifying affective content, simultaneously empowering marginalized voices while heightening intergroup tensions. As a result, communities deploy strategic narratives invoking religious imagery or political symbols to negotiate identity, mobilize support, and challenge authority, producing constant renegotiation of communal boundaries.¹⁹

Religious and political expressions in the postmodern era exhibit marked diversification and complexity, underpinned by an epistemological shift away from unified dogmas toward pluralistic, individualized practices. Within the sphere of religious life, adherents frequently engage in syncretic spiritualities, integrating motifs and rituals across multiple faith traditions or even embracing non-denominational belief systems. Such fluidity foregrounds the primacy of personal, subjective experience: religious value is increasingly gauged by individual encounter and meaning-making rather than by adherence to fixed doctrinal codes.²⁰

Concurrently, postmodern political expression undergoes analogous fragmentation. Traditional ideological paradigms lose their hegemony, giving way to a mosaic of competing perspectives that reject any claim to absolute political truth. This climate elevates issues of identity-gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation—as central axes of mobilization and political discourse. Campaigns and movements foreground social justice, championing the rights of marginalized and minority groups while repudiating authoritarian or monolithic governance models. The resultant political landscape is characterized by pluralism,

¹⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition (Theory and History of Literature; v. 10)*, *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 1, 1984.

¹⁹ Piliang, *Dunia yang Dilipat: Tamasya Melampaui Batas-Batas Kebudayaan*, Cantrik Pustaka, (2019),

²⁰ Miftahul Munir, “Postmodernisme: Sebuah Dekonstruksi Dan Kritik Dalam Seni,” *EKSPRESI: Indonesian Art Journal* 10, no. 1 (2010): 42–57, <https://journal.isi.ac.id/index.php/ekspresi/article/view/7851>.

contestation, and an ongoing negotiation of values in pursuit of more inclusive, participatory forms of governance.²¹²²

In the postmodern era, these transformations are further accelerated by digital media.²³ Firstly, digital religious consumerism reflects paradigm shifts described by Jean Baudrillard, who argued that religion has become a public spectacle and a commodity consumed via social platforms. In this framework, simulacra constitute the “reality” encountered by society, presenting the authentic as a replica and shaping cognitive schemas and behaviors of the faithful. Secondly, postmodern political engagement intensified around 1998, when religion-infused political issues rose prominently within a contested democratic environment, evolving into a form of social-media entertainment.²⁴

Baudrillard further argued that postmodernity is dominated by media and simulation, with mass communication replacing tangible reality with an artificial construct. The digital realm offers a proliferation of imaginaries illusions, conceptual artefacts, hallucinations that stand in for direct experience. This is described as the “virtual world,” “simulation,” “image,” “simulacra,” or “hyperreality,” illustrating how media mediate and sometimes replace authentic engagement with reality.²⁵

Contemporary religious expression increasingly unfolds within virtual environments, employing photography, illustrations, video, and film to transmit spiritual narratives and rituals to global audiences.²⁶ This mirrors Baudrillard’s notion of simulacra, in which mediated representations form a “second reality” that displaces deeper religious substance. Although such simulacra project vivid images of faith communities and practices, they do not reference the substantive core of lived religiosity, instead emphasizing surface aesthetics and stylized reenactments. As a result, digital faith expressions may appear convincing while remaining detached from authentic experiential and communal dimensions of religion.²⁷

²¹ Krida Amalia Husna, “Dari Tradisional Ke Post Modern: Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia,” *SENTRI: Jurnal Riset Ilmiah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 434–41, <https://doi.org/10.55681/sentri.v3i1.2197>.

²² Darsitun, “Menakar Ulang Hermeneutika dalam Studi Alquran di Era Modern dan Kontemporer (Pendekatan Sastra, Sejarah dan Sains), *Islamadina: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (2021): 40-57.

²³ Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1007/CBO9781139108706>.

²⁴ Theguh Saumantri, Taufik Hidayatulloh, and Dhea Dayuranggi Meghatruh, “Konsumerisme Beragama Di Era Digital: Analisis Paradigma Postmodernisme Jean Baudrillard Terhadap Fenomena Beragama Umat Islam Di Indonesia,” *Islamadina: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 2 (2023): 273, <https://doi.org/10.30595/islamadina.v24i2.14961>.

²⁵ Islam, “Simulacra Sebagai Kritik Atas Modernisme (Studi Analisis Atas Pemikiran Jean P. Baudrillard)”, *Jaqfi: Jurnal Aqidah Dan Filsafat Islam*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2017): 88-112.

²⁶ Achmad, “Politisasi Agama di Era Digital dan Penanganannya”, *Prosiding Senaspolhi*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2018); 141.

²⁷ Jauhari, “Media Sosial: Hiperrealitas dan Simulacra Perkembangan Masyarakat Zaman Now dalam Pemikiran Jean Baudrillard”, *Jurnal Al-‘Adalah*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (2017): 117-136.

Simulacra and the Hyperreality of Media Culture

Simulacra, the plural form of simulacrum, originates from the Latin *simulare*, meaning to copy, represent, or imitate. According to Merriam-Webster, a simulacrum refers to a representation or likeness of reality. However, as theorized by Jean Baudrillard, simulation is not merely the act of representing reality but rather a process in which reality itself is replaced by its representation. In this framework, simulacra condition our ways of interpreting the world and ourselves, as we increasingly engage with representations and simulations rather than with actual reality.²⁸

Baudrillard also highlights the concept of the sign as a crucial pillar of his thought. In his analysis, signs no longer maintain a direct relationship with their referents; they have lost their original reference and instead function autonomously as simulations of reality. In contemporary society, especially within the digital era, signs and simulations increasingly dominate our lived experience, giving rise to a state of hyperreality in which physical reality and its representations become ever harder to distinguish. The sign thus emerges as a fundamental component in constructing simulations. Baudrillard argues that signs can no longer adequately represent the authentic meaning of the world; instead, they transform and become independent of reality, producing meanings that are detached from the objects they originally signified.²⁹

Baudrillard categorizes signs into three types.³⁰ First, *real signs*, which directly represent phenomena in the material world and maintain a clear correspondence to their referents — for example, traffic signs, natural symbols, or words that describe tangible objects. Second, *simulacra*, which represent realities already supplanted by simulation. These signs no longer connect directly to physical referents but instead construct an autonomous world of simulation. Examples include television images, films, or digital visuals that generate realities separated from actual physical contexts. Third, *false simulacra*, or *simulacrum*, which serve to support and extend the simulation process, creating an artificial reality fully detached from the material world. These signs no longer attempt to represent reality at all, but rather strengthen the simulation itself — as seen, for instance, in video games, where participants inhabit a virtual world entirely disconnected from physical experience.³¹

This typology clarifies how signs have evolved from simple representations of physical reality into independent constructors of meaning within an era of simulation and hyperreality. It underscores how our contemporary world is increasingly immersed in symbolic

²⁸ Saumantri, Hidayatulloh, and Meghatrih, “Konsumerisme Beragama Di Era Digital: Analisis Paradigma Postmodernisme Jean Baudrillard Terhadap Fenomena Beragama Umat Islam Di Indonesia.”

²⁹ Saumantri, “Hyper Religiusitas Di Era Digital: Analisis Paradigma Postmodernisme Jean Baudrillard Terhadap Fenomena Keberagamaan Di Media Sosial.”

³⁰ Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations.”

³¹ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*.

environments and mediated representations that operate separately from actual, material reality.

In the context of the digital era, information technology and social media play a crucial role in amplifying the dynamics of simulation and hyperreality. Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and the sign are especially relevant for understanding how religious reality is produced through media and technology. Increasingly, individuals engage with the virtual realm of social media, where their identities and interactions are shaped more by digital self-representations than by direct, embodied experiences in the physical world. Thus, Baudrillard's framework of simulation and the sign provides a critical foundation for analyzing how contemporary reality is mediated. In the digital era, representations and simulations have come to dominate lived experience, distorting physical reality through an ever-expanding symbolic universe.³²

The hyperreal *simulacra* of media culture refers to the phenomenon in which the material world is progressively reduced to a distorted representation, effectively replaced by media-driven realities that more powerfully shape public perceptions.³³ In the postmodern condition, media exercise extraordinary influence over how individuals understand and interpret the world around them. Hyperreal simulacra in media culture occur when images, signs, and symbolic codes supplant authentic experience and are collectively recognized as the dominant reality. Media, in this sense, present highly idealized and stylized portrayals that frequently diverge from lived actuality.³⁴ In shaping this manufactured reality, media function as powerful agents that reconfigure how society perceives, understands, and navigates the world.

For example, the hyperreal simulacra of media culture are evident in the beauty industry, which routinely employs sophisticated photo-editing and retouching techniques to craft highly idealized images of the human body and face that rarely reflect actual, lived reality. As a result, media-generated ideals of beauty and body image often remain unattainable and unrealistic, shaping self-perceptions in ways that can be profoundly damaging to individual self-esteem and mental health. In this way, media images function not as transparent reflections of reality but as hyperreal constructs that establish distorted standards against which individuals measure themselves.

The same mechanisms of hyperreal simulacra are equally apparent in the political sphere, where media representations exert considerable power in shaping public perceptions

³² Saumantri, "Hyper Religiusitas Di Era Digital: Analisis Paradigma Postmodernisme Jean Baudrillard Terhadap Fenomena Keberagamaan Di Media Sosial."

³³ V R Masut, R Wijanarko, and P Pandor, "Objektivikasi Subjek Dalam Budaya Kontemporer Berdasarkan Konsep Hiperrealitas Jean Baudrillard," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia*, 2023.

³⁴ Haroyono, "Kepalsuan Hidup dalam Hiperrealitas Iklan", *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2020): 232.

of political leaders, parties, and policy issues. Media narratives can fabricate idealized images or manipulate factual information to bolster a politician's popularity or, conversely, to discredit opponents. By privileging spectacle over substance, political communication in the hyperreal realm reduces complex policy debates to easily consumable visual tropes and emotionally charged messages, contributing to a culture of superficial political engagement.

In certain instances, the influence of hyperreal simulacra in media culture produces a profound ambiguity between reality and its representation, leaving individuals unable to distinguish what genuinely occurs from what is portrayed through mediated channels. This blurring of boundaries has far-reaching consequences for crucial dimensions of human experience, including culture, politics, and personal identity. In the digital era, social media and the internet have significantly amplified and accelerated the power of media in everyday life, expanding the scope and intensity of its symbolic influence. These developments underscore the central argument of postmodern theory that media now play an indispensable role in constructing public perceptions and shaping our collective sense of reality.³⁵

The Politicization of Religion in the Digital Era

According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (the authoritative Indonesian language dictionary), “*politisasi*” refers to the act of rendering a situation, action, or idea political in character. Applied to religion, *politisasi agama* thus signifies the transformation of religious practices, symbols, or ideas into tools of political strategy, subordinating their spiritual or theological dimensions to political objectives.³⁶

In the digital era, the politicization of religion increasingly involves the strategic use of social media to advance political agendas rooted in specific religious worldviews. Politicians and political groups deploy digital platforms to mobilize religious identities as cohesive voting blocs, often leveraging religious narratives or politicized sermons to rally electoral support. Such practices can exacerbate polarization and intensify conflict between different religious communities, while also promoting discrimination or intolerance toward minority faith groups.³⁷

Moreover, the politicization of religion in digital contexts often features targeted online campaigns that seek to influence electoral outcomes by exploiting sensitive religious issues. These campaigns may circulate content designed to persuade voters to support candidates who align with their religious identity, sometimes manipulating emotions around sacred symbols to do so. The potential for such manipulation raises profound concerns about the integrity of democratic processes and the ethical use of religious discourse in public life.

³⁵ Haroyono, “Kepalsuan Hidup dalam Hiperrealitas Iklan”, *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2020): 232.

³⁶ Malik dan Batubara

³⁷ Budi Kurniawan, “Politikasi Agama di Tahun Politik: Politik Pasca-Kebenaran di Indonesia dan Ancaman bagi Demokrasi”, *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (2018): 133-154.

Nonetheless, the digital politicization of religion is not exclusively negative. Digital platforms can equally serve as channels for progressive and humanitarian actors to advocate for religious rights, promote interfaith tolerance, and highlight social justice issues relevant to religious communities. The broad diffusion of information has enabled greater public awareness of critical religious concerns, opening opportunities for more inclusive and rights-based engagements in the public sphere.³⁸

The role of religion in political life can vary substantially depending on a nation's historical context, cultural traditions, and dominant belief systems. In some countries, religion exerts a profound influence on politics, with political parties explicitly grounded in religious ideology or moral values that shape public policy and legislation. In these settings, religion often provides a normative framework through which laws and policies are legitimized, reflecting broader communal values and ethical standards. Furthermore, religion can serve as a powerful instrument for consolidating political power. Political leaders may strategically employ religious rhetoric and symbols to garner popular support and legitimize their authority in the eyes of the public, effectively merging spiritual legitimacy with political power.

By contrast, in states that adhere to secular principles and maintain a strict separation of religion and politics, religious belief is expected to remain a matter of private conviction, without direct influence over political decision-making. Within these secular environments, religion is largely confined to the personal and communal spheres, preserving a clear boundary between religious practice and state governance.

However, in recent years, particularly against the backdrop of increasingly polarized and complex political climates, religion has reemerged as a significant factor in political discourse and decision-making. The rise of religious movements, whether organized or individual, has encouraged more active participation in political debates and policy issues deemed vital to religious communities. This growing engagement reflects a broader global trend in which religious identity becomes a vehicle for collective mobilization, advocacy, and even resistance.

Nevertheless, numerous critics have expressed concern about the potential dangers of religion's involvement in politics. They argue that religious influence may undermine human rights, restrict individual freedoms, and provoke social conflict. The debate over the politicization of religion also emphasizes how religious language and symbolism can be instrumentalized to pursue political ambitions and consolidate power, raising questions about authenticity and manipulation. In response, some scholars have proposed frameworks such

³⁸ Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana, "Agama Digital (Digital Religion) dan Relevansinya Terhadap Studi Agama Interdisipliner: Sebuah Tinjauan Literatur", *At-Takfir: Jurnal Pendidikan, Hukum dan sosial keagamaan*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (2022): 35-56.

as “political religion” or “religious politics” to better conceptualize and analyze the complex interactions between religion and politics. These frameworks aim to capture the multiple dimensions of religious thought, identity, and collective action that shape political processes on both local and global scales.

CONCLUSION

In the digital era, information technology and social media have assumed a pivotal role in amplifying the dynamics of simulation and hyperreality. Drawing on Baudrillard's framework of simulation and the sign, one can see how contemporary religious realities are increasingly produced, circulated, and consumed through digital media. Individuals and communities now operate within virtual environments where personal identities and social interactions are shaped far more by curated digital representations than by direct, embodied experience. This profound shift reconfigures how people perceive themselves and their social worlds, as mediated symbols and images gradually displace authentic, lived realities. In this context, the boundaries between the virtual and the physical become increasingly blurred, encouraging forms of engagement that prioritize spectacle and surface-level symbolism over depth, tradition, or shared meaning. Such transformations highlight the urgency of critically examining how the digital environment not only mediates but actively reshapes religious belief, ritual practices, and communal affiliations in ways that challenge established understandings of the sacred and the communal.

Simultaneously, the politicization of religion in the digital sphere further illustrates these dynamics of simulation. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for advancing political agendas rooted in religious worldviews, enabling politicians and affiliated groups to reinforce religious identities as cohesive bases of electoral support. These strategies often intensify polarization, deepen intergroup conflict, and foster discrimination against religious minorities, particularly when sensitive symbols or theological themes are strategically deployed to stoke sectarian sentiments. Moreover, targeted online campaigns can manipulate religious loyalties to influence electoral outcomes, thereby distorting democratic processes and undermining pluralistic values. Nevertheless, the same digital infrastructures also open pathways for progressive actors, civil society organizations, and interfaith networks to promote religious freedom, advance humanitarian concerns, and support inclusive public dialogue. These counter-movements demonstrate how digital platforms, despite their risks, can still serve transformative purposes by fostering cross-cultural understanding and empowering marginalized voices. In sum, the digital era has profoundly transformed both the religious and political landscapes, demanding nuanced and ethically grounded approaches to questions of simulation, hyperreality, and the contested place of religion in contemporary society.

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